

## THE JOY OF FRIENDSHIP

---

What is a friend? The dictionary says a friend is one who is attached to another by affection or esteem. That seems a tad formal.

The best definition I've found is in Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (NIV), 9“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: 10If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!”

Now, let's read about a man who desperately needed someone to help him up. Mark 8:22(NIV) They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him.

...some people brought the blind man and begged Jesus to touch, or heal, him. One year ago I preached about this blind man who required a second touch to be healed. But today, let's think about “some people.”

The blind man needed friends to help him up. A friend is a pal, a buddy, a comrade. Have you noticed how we classify friendship—friends, good friends, and best friends—someone we can bare our souls to.

A true friend brings out the best in us. A friend accepts us as we are. A friend can be depended upon. A true friend encourages us to keep going when we're ready to throw in the towel.

Real friends are those who, when you've made a fool of yourself, don't feel you've done a permanent job.

The Bible tells us that a friend loves us at all times, in spite of ourselves. It also says that we can have many companions and acquaintances, but a friend sticks closer than a brother.

Your brother may not always be your friend, but a friend is always a brother. Today, let's think about Christian friendship.

# 1. We are created for relationships.

After God created Adam in the Garden of Eden, He said, “It is not good for the man to be alone” (Gen. 2:18). God’s very first comment on the state of human beings was that Adam needed someone.

That someone was Eve. And Eve needed Adam. God is making a statement here about our natures. This is more than about the relationship between a man and a woman.

It is also about relationships—God created us for relationship with others. Friends to love us, lift us up, pray for us and with us, and help when needed.

That’s one of the reasons Jesus created the Church. The Bible’s favorite metaphor for the church is “the body,” or the “Body of Christ.”

Our physical body is not just a bunch of parts that have no connection with one another. Hit your thumb with a hammer and your brain will instantly let you know how intimately related the parts of your body are.

It’s the same with the church—we are connected with one another. We need each other desperately. Not one member can say to another member, “I don’t need you.” For instance, in Hebrews 10 we are told not to neglect meeting together as the church. One of the reasons is so that we can encourage one another on toward love and good deeds.”

We don’t come to church just to show up and be counted, or to feel like we’ve done our duty. We come to worship our Lord, to study his Word, fellowship together, and to encourage.

God wants us to develop meaningful relationships with other people. We are enriched when we have friends. We enrich others when we are their friend. This is the meaning of...

Philippians 2:4, “Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

Sometimes we come into church on Sunday morning needing a word of comfort from someone. We may be tired physically or spent emotionally. Even if we don’t say anything, we are lifted up just to be with friends who love and care for us.

Sometimes I'm tired or emotionally spent, but no more than many of you. It encourages and strengthens me because you are here. And I pray that I say or do something that lifts you up and makes your day brighter.

When we fail to develop relationships because we think we don't need them, we are sinning before God and failing to be what God wants us to be to others. That's because...

## 2. Friendships are important.

In John 15:14 Jesus looked at His disciples and said, "You are my friends." Even God the Son needed friends. So he deliberately developed relationships.

The proof of this friendship was not only the cross on which he died, but the truth which he shared: v. 15, "I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."

Friends talk to one another and share things. Jesus invested His earthly life in building relationships with those men and women. Some relationships were closer than others were—Peter, James and John seemed to be the closest to Jesus—but He was close to all the apostles.

Jesus also developed friendships with Mary of Magdela, with Lazarus and his sisters, Martha and Mary. It was important even to Jesus to have friends and to be a friend to them.

Some of you are leery of deep relationships. You've been burned. Maybe a friend has stabbed you in the back, gossiped about you, left you hanging or wasn't there when you needed him or her.

Now you have the Julius Caesar Syndrome. Caesar thought Marcus Brutus was his friend until Brutus literally stabbed him in the back and assassinated him.

Once you've been stabbed you don't want to go through that again. So you decide you can get along without friends. So you deprive yourself of the joy and richness of friendship.

God's Word tells us that we can never be all that He wants us to be apart from relationships. The risk of friendship is worth the effort. It is critical that we learn to build friendships and relationships.

When Jesus said to His disciples, "You are my friends," there was a bad apple in the bunch named Judas. And Jesus knew it.

But He still invested Himself even in Judas. He loved Judas, prayed for him, and didn't treat him any differently from the other disciples.

Still Judas betrayed Jesus. So if Jesus Himself lost a friend, not all of our relationships are going to work out either. But it was still worth it for Jesus. After his resurrection his friends were so committed that they gave their lives for Him.

And it's worth it for us to be a friend and to accept friendship because friends lift you up, encourage you, and make you better.

### 3. Friendship is not only nice, it's necessary.

If we are going to become more and more like Christ, we need friends. It's not just a matter of one person saying, "Hey, I can live my life without getting close to anyone. I don't need anybody."

There's much more at stake than that. Listen to what the Apostle Paul tells us: "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently . . . Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:1-2).

We can't restore a brother or sister unless we are close enough to them to know when they are hurting—or unless that one is comfortable enough with you to say, "I need help."

When do you need a friend the most? Not when times are good and hunky-dory. Everybody wants to be your friend then. Eccl. 4:10 reminds us, If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up.

You need a friend the most when times are rough, or when you are taking the wrong forks in the road. Proverbs 27:17 says, "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."

We need friends to keep us sharp, to rub off the blunt edges, to make us better persons. We need friends to challenge us and sharpen our thinking.

We need friends to help us make good and right decisions. We especially need friends to help us hone our spiritual lives until they are razor sharp.

## 4. Three good kinds of friends:

- **A Paul**

This is a maturer believer—who is willing to mentor you, to build into your life. Not someone who's smarter or more gifted than you, but somebody who's been where you're trying to go.

Somebody who is willing to share his/her strengths and weaknesses--everything he or she has learned in the laboratory of life. Somebody whose faith you'll want to imitate. Finding someone like this may require you to lay aside your pride and say, "I really don't know all I need to know about being a person of God.

"I've got so much to learn about loving my family—my wife/husband and my children the way I need to. Maybe a wise person who is walking with the Lord can help me."

- **A Barnabas**

This is a soul brother, somebody who loves you but is not impressed by you, and will hold you accountable. Somebody who's willing to keep you honest, who's willing to say, "Hey, man, you're neglecting your wife, and don't give me any guff!"

Or, "You're not treating your husband right. Give him some room to be a man and husband." A brother or sister is someone who is on your level—a friend who can relate to you, where you are now, because she or he is going through the same stuff.

Your Barnabas can be an accountability partner to you. You can work through things together. And, like Barnabas, you can encourage each other

- **A Timothy**

A Timothy is a younger person into whose life you are building. For a model, read 1 and 2 Timothy. Here was Paul building into the life of his protégé--affirming, encouraging, teaching, correcting, directing, and praying.

Every person needs a Timothy. You and I need to be a model that younger people can look up to. They need to see Christ at work in us. Do you have these three friends in your life?

## 5. The best friend of all is Jesus Christ.

The greatest friend to a Christian is Jesus Christ. He can do more for you than anyone else on earth. When the Bible says there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother, it is describing the friendship of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is a friend who helps us overcome our sins, overcome our failures, and overcome our problems. But He can't do it unless, first of all, He is your Savior.

And He cannot be your Savior unless you ask Him to be. Do you want Jesus to be your friend today?

### Application

—where do you go from here?

- **Decide to start building friendships.**

If you want friends, you must decide to be a friend. It's up to you.

- **Make time to develop relationships**

Notice I said "make time," not find time. You won't find extra time. It's not there. You have to make time for others.

- **Be a friend.**

To have friends, you have to be a friend. Work at lifting others up and affirming them.e